

ZAMBIA 2021 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution declares the country a Christian nation but also has provisions that guarantee religious freedom and uphold the country's multireligious composition. It prohibits religious discrimination and provides for freedom of conscience and belief. Religious figures strongly opposed attempts by the former government of President Edgar Lungu, which governed the country until August, to impose a "national dress" reportedly aimed at regulating dressing among citizens. During the lead-up to the August 12 general elections, the government released 50 million kwacha (\$3 million) as COVID-19 relief funds for churches, which main religious organizations declined to access, as they said they stated they perceived it as a form of electoral bribery, given its timing. In September, President Hakainde Hichilema, who came to power after the August election, abolished the Ministry of National Guidance and Religious Affairs and placed its functions under the Office of the Vice President. Most religious groups had opposed the existence of the ministry, especially some of its key functions. Previous government and ruling party officials publicly attacked religious leaders who expressed dissenting views on governance issues. Prominent religious groups and civil society organizations organized ecumenical prayers before and after the August elections. The three main church umbrella groups (known as "church mother bodies") – the Zambia Conference of Catholic Bishops (ZCCB), Council of Churches in Zambia (CCZ), and Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia (EFZ) – which had opposed the government's involvement in religious affairs held national prayers on September 19 at the Cathedral of the Holy Cross to celebrate the August 12 "peaceful, free, and fair" elections. President Hichilema and representatives of various religious and political organizations, the diplomatic community, and the media attended the prayer service. During the service, President Hichilema said the country would remain a Christian nation and the government would strive to ensure the declaration existed not only in words but also in deeds. Former president Lungu and the opposition Patriotic Front (PF) and its allied political and religious organizations boycotted the event.

Attacks and killings of individuals suspected of practicing witchcraft continued in various parts of the country. As in previous years, victims were mostly elderly persons, including a 70-year-old man who was killed by unknown assailants and a 73-year-old man beaten to death by his wife and son. Religious leaders continued to hold regular meetings to promote mutual understanding of, and joint advocacy on, religious and other social issues.

The Charge d’Affaires and embassy officials met with government and religious figures to discuss topics related to religious freedom, interreligious dialogue, and governance. The Charge d’Affaires also met with religious leaders to discuss issues of religious freedom, interfaith relations, and elections.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the population at 19.1 million (midyear 2021). According to Zambia Statistics Agency (ZamStats) estimates, 95.5 percent of the country’s population is Christian. Of these, 75.3 percent identify as Protestant, and 20.2 percent as Roman Catholic. Protestant groups with the largest numbers of adherents include the Anglican Church, evangelical Christians, and Pentecostal groups. According to ZamStats, approximately 2.7 percent of the population is Muslim, with smaller numbers of Hindus, Baha’is, Buddhists, Jews, and Sikhs. Even smaller numbers adhere to other belief systems, including indigenous religions and witchcraft, or hold no religious beliefs. Many persons combine Christianity and indigenous beliefs.

The Muslim community is predominantly Sunni, with small groups of Ismaili and Shia Muslims. According to the Lusaka Muslim Society, there are approximately 100,000 Muslims in the country, including Congolese and Somali refugees. Both Sunni and Shia Muslims are primarily concentrated in Lusaka, Eastern, and Copperbelt Provinces. Many are immigrants or the children of immigrants from South Asia, Somalia, and the Middle East who have acquired citizenship. Hindus, mostly of South Asian descent, are located largely in the Eastern, Copperbelt, and Lusaka Provinces and estimate the size of their community at 10,000 as of 2019. There are small numbers of Jews, mostly in Lusaka and Northern Province.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution declares the country a Christian nation but upholds freedom of conscience, belief, and religion for all persons. It prohibits discrimination based on religion and provides for the right of individuals to manifest and propagate religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice, and observance. It also protects the freedom of individuals to change their religion or belief and states that no one shall be compelled to take an oath or perform acts contrary to his or her religious beliefs. The law prescribes legal recourse against, and penalties of fines and imprisonment for, violations of religious freedom.

Under the law, naming or accusing a person as being a witch or wizard is a criminal offense punishable either by fine or imprisonment of up to one year, while those who profess knowledge of witchcraft may face up to two years' imprisonment. The law has an exception for those who report to police any person alleged to be professing knowledge of, or practicing, witchcraft.

All religious groups are required to affiliate with an umbrella body, often referred to as a "mother body," which gathers individual churches and denominations under one administrative authority. There are 14 mother bodies: seven Christian and seven non-Christian. These are the ZCCB, CCZ, EFZ, Independent Churches of Zambia, Apostles Council of Churches, Seventh-day Adventist Church, Christian Missions in Many Lands, Islamic Supreme Council of Zambia, Hindu Association of Zambia, Guru Nanak Council of Zambia, Jewish Board of Deputies Zambia, Rastafarians, Council for Zambia Jewry, and Baha'i Faith in Zambia. The largest mother bodies are the ZCCB, EFZ, and CCZ.

The Minister of Home Affairs and Internal Security retains the discretion to register any religious entity. To register, a group must have a unique name, a recommendation letter from its mother body, and a document of the clergy's professional qualifications from a "recognized and reputable" theological school, but the government provides no specific definition or list of qualifying institutions. The Office of the Chief Registrar of Societies then conducts a preliminary assessment of the applicant's authenticity and religious purpose as well as a security check. Religious groups must pay a one-time fee of 3,000 kwacha (\$180) to establish registration and 100 kwacha (\$6) every first quarter of the year to retain it. They are also required to adhere to laws pertaining to labor, employment practices, and criminal conduct.

The Minister of Home Affairs and Internal Security has the legal authority to revoke the registration of religious groups. Grounds for revocation include failure to pay registration fees or a finding by the Minister that the group has professed purposes or has taken or intends to take actions that run counter to the interests of "peace, welfare, or good order." Groups may appeal this finding in the courts. The government has the authority to levy fines and prison sentences of up to seven years against unregistered religious groups and their members.

Until its abolishment in September, the then Ministry of National Guidance and Religious Affairs was responsible for strengthening the identity of the country as a Christian nation, developing self-regulatory frameworks for church and religious umbrella groups, promoting interdenominational dialogue, preserving religious

heritage sites, and coordinating public religious celebrations, such as the commemoration of the declaration as a Christian nation (December 29), the National Day of Prayer, Fasting, and Repentance (October 18), and World Prayer Day (first Friday in March). The former ministry's mandate also included ensuring Christian values were reflected in government, education, family, media, arts and entertainment, and business, as well as promoting church-state, interdenominational, and interfaith dialogue.

The law provides for privileged tax treatment for public benefit organizations, including religious groups, provided they are established for the promotion of religion, education, and relief of poverty or other distress.

The constitution allows religious groups the right to establish and maintain private schools and provide religious instruction to members of their religious communities. The government requires religious instruction in all schools from grades one through nine. Students may request education in their religion and may opt out of religious instruction only if the school is not able to accommodate their request. Religious education after grade nine is optional and is not offered at all schools. The religious curriculum focuses on Christian teachings but also incorporates comparative studies of Islam, Hinduism, and traditional beliefs.

The Department of Immigration under the Ministry of Home Affairs and Internal Security has a mandate to approve or deny permits and visas for travelers coming into the country for religious activities. For any foreign clergy entering the country, religious groups must provide their proof of legal registration as a religious group in the country, a recommendation letter from their aligned mother body, and clearance from clergy in the country of origin. This documentation is presented to the Department of Immigration.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

Religious leaders stated the government of President Lungu, which led the country until August, and the government of President Hichilema, which governed after August, monitored clergy who expressed dissenting views on governance issues, and viewed these clergy as being “aligned” with the political opposition; they reported they were subsequently targeted and harassed by party officials under both governments for opposing some policies. In July, for example, then-ruling PF media director Antonio Mwanza accused CCZ General Secretary Rev. Emmanuel

Chikoya and Archbishop Telesphore Mpundu, retired Catholic Archbishop of Lusaka, of belonging to the then-opposition United Party for National Development (UPND) because they criticized the government for restricting civil liberties and closing down independent media.

In January, then minister of National Guidance and Religious Affairs Godfridah Sumaili proposed the introduction of a “national dress code to promote decent dressing among citizens.” Religious figures opposed the proposal. CCZ General Secretary Rev. Emmanuel Chikoya said the proposal would infringe on religious freedom and said he wondered whether the standard dress code would be traditional Christian (i.e., modest in appearance) or traditional Zambian attire. Sumaili later stated she was misquoted and that she was referring to wearing national dress.

Religious leaders critical of the Lungu government reported a lack of protection for those holding peaceful dissenting assemblies, leaving protesters vulnerable to physical assault and disruption of their meetings by police and sympathizers of the PF. On the night of August 6, police in Mongu fired tear gas canisters at UPND party workers, and some canisters fell into the official residence of Catholic Bishop of Mongu Evans Chinyemba, a strong critic of the Lungu government, choking him and his guards. According to Chinyemba, the canisters fell by accident as police were dispersing individuals.

In February, the government released 50 million kwacha (\$3 million) as a COVID-19 relief package for churches, religious organizations, and other faith-based organizations. Then minister of National Guidance and Religious Affairs Sumaili explained that the fund was aimed at “stimulating the economy and ensuring sustenance of the church and its activities.” The Catholic bishops conference refused to access the relief fund. In an April 4 statement, ZCCB president Bishop George Lungu reported that Catholic bishops had “taken a stand to respectfully decline receiving or accessing the funds,” citing several reasons. Lungu said the timing of the initiative left room for speculation the funds were meant for vote buying. He stated further that the source of the funds lacked transparency. Lungu, the Bishop of Chipata in addition to his position of ZCCB president, directed all Catholic institutions in his diocese not to access the funds. He said that based on the principles of social justice and preferential options for the poor, it would be prudent for the government to allocate the funds to other needy areas. “A better and long-lasting empowerment for the Church would be to exempt it from paying high fees on immigration visas, as well as other forms of taxes,” Bishop Lungu added. According to media, then president Lungu was displeased with the

Catholic bishops' stance and met privately with Bishop Lungu in April to understand the reasons for the Church's refusal to accept the government's church empowerment fund.

Catholic, Protestant, and Islamic mother bodies, along with leaders of other religious groups, continued to oppose the existence of the Ministry of National Guidance and Religious Affairs, particularly for its perceived mandate to "actualize" the constitutional declaration of the country as a Christian nation. Religious figures stated the declaration infringed upon the individual's right to religious freedom. Dr. Tarcisius Mukuka, a former biblical scholar at St Mary's University Twickenham in London, said that to maintain religious pluralism and tolerance, the country should remove the declaration from the constitution and replace it with a more inclusive statement of religious freedom.

In September, following the August 12 general elections, President Hichilema abolished the Ministry of National Guidance and Religious Affairs. The Office of the Vice President absorbed the national guidance and religious affairs portfolio, but it remained unclear at year's end whether the religious functions of the former ministry would continue.

After the elections, on September 19, the largest church mother bodies – ZCCB, CCZ, and EFZ – held national prayers at the Cathedral of the Holy Cross to celebrate the August 12 "peaceful, free, and fair" elections. President Hichilema and representatives of various religious and political organizations, the diplomatic community, and the media attended the prayer service. Former president Lungu and the opposition PF and the Independent Churches of Zambia boycotted the event, stating the prayers were organized in a divisive manner and the elections were not peaceful, free, or fair because of the reported electoral violence.

The new government reaffirmed the country's declaration as a Christian nation. Speaking at a service at the Cathedral of the Holy Cross in Lusaka on September 19, President Hichilema said the country would remain a Christian nation and the government would strive to ensure the declaration existed not only in words but also in deeds.

Some pro-PF government Pentecostal churches opposed the abolition of the Ministry of National Guidance and Religious Affairs. For example, the Bishops Council of Zambia (BCZ) protested the decision. BCZ General Secretary Able Kaela demanded that the government rescind its decision and bring back the ministry. Kaela said the ministry was necessary in upholding the nation's

Christianity and played a vital role in guiding the country on moral issues. Media also reported that the Council of Pastors and Prophets (CPP) commended the abolition of the ministry, saying it was a platform for bogus clergymen who syphoned public funds. A CPP spokesperson said the declaration of the country as a Christian nation, enshrined in the constitution and in compliance with Christian values and principles, was more important than the existence of the ministry. Following the abolition of the ministry, Bishop Alfred Kalembo, Presiding Bishop for the Pilgrim Wesleyan Church and an opponent of the ministry, proposed the government now allow the Church to regain its function of organizing and coordinating national events such as the National Day of Prayer and Fasting, in conjunction with the Office of the Secretary to the Cabinet, a function which the ministry had exclusively exercised.

The government did not register any new mother bodies during the year. A moratorium imposed in 2019 on the registration of new churches and religious groups continued to remain in force pending adoption of a new policy on minimum standards for churches and religious groups that would be included in the government's framework for registering churches. Religious leaders stated the clearance procedures for foreign clergy entering the country remained expensive, laborious, and bureaucratic, impeding some activities of religious groups. According to the ZCCB, immigration fees for a temporary permit for missionary priests, sisters, and lay volunteers increased to 21,210 kwacha (\$1,300) from the previous 3,230 kwacha (\$190) and the renewal permit increased to 18,550 kwacha (\$1,000) from the previous 2,200 kwacha (\$130). In April, the ZCCB urged the government to consider lowering immigration fees for organizations that benefit the public, such as the Catholic Church, particularly for missionaries "who endure hardships as they provide pastoral care to many needy Zambians in the country's rural areas."

On October 18, the government held the seventh National Day of Prayer, Fasting, Repentance, and Reconciliation. Vice President Mutale Nalumango officiated at the national event in Lusaka, while President Hichilema and other senior government officials attended prayer services across the country. During the event, the Vice President reaffirmed the country's declaration as a Christian nation and pledged to maintain it in the constitution. Themed "Zambia Seeks Sustained Unity for Shared Prosperity," the commemoration was held as thanksgiving to God for sustaining the country amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Work on the 10,000-seat Interdenominational House of Prayer remained pending at year's end due to a lack of government funding. The structure would replace the

Anglican Cathedral of the Holy Cross as the “national cathedral,” once completed.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Incidents of violence against, and killings of, suspected practitioners of witchcraft continued, particularly against elderly citizens. On June 11, a 70-year-old man from Kalumbila District died after being assaulted by a mob on suspicion he was practicing witchcraft, local media reported. On June 20, media reported that a 62-year-old housewife from Kitwe, acting jointly with her adult son, beat her 73-year-old husband to death on suspicion he was practicing witchcraft. The two accused the deceased, Wrightwell Chanda, of “being a wizard responsible for their lack of success and subsequent hardship.” At year’s end, police were still investigating both cases.

On August 1, the Coalition for Peaceful Elections in Zambia (CPEZ) and the Christian Churches Monitoring Group (CCMG) organized national ecumenical prayers at the Cathedral of the Holy Cross in Lusaka, attended by religious and civic leaders in person and virtually. The prayers were held amid rising violence in the lead-up to the August 12 general elections.

The main church mother bodies continued to hold regular meetings to promote mutual understanding of, and joint advocacy on, religious and governance issues. These included collaborating with the government to enforce COVID-19 regulations in churches, monitoring the electoral process, and organizing and coordinating national prayers.

During the Religious Freedom Day commemorations, religious leaders stated that religious freedom entailed equality of religious organizations (whether large or small) and the right of communities and individuals “to practice the religion of their choice without being stereotyped, discriminated, or suppressed,” which they said both were lacking in the country.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

During the year, the Charge d’Affaires and embassy officials met with government officials from the Office of the Vice President, from the then Ministry of National Guidance and Religious Affairs, and with religious leaders and various religious groups. The meetings addressed a wide range of issues, government regulations, religious tolerance, governance, human rights, and the August 12 elections. In January, embassy officials used social media platforms to commemorate Religious

Freedom Day and conducted a series of engagements. These included interviews with key religious figures, including Christian, Jewish, and Muslim leaders, in which the participants explained what religious freedom in the country meant to them, what they saw as advancements in religious freedom, and how the country could protect the religious freedom of religious minority groups even while maintaining its constitutionally declared status as a Christian nation.